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ABSTRACT

Although it has been widely recognized that the United States has moved into the Information Age, the federal government has been slow to establish a single mechanism to coordinate the many facets of the Information Age. The Special Libraries Association (SLA) proposes the establishment of a National Academy of Information to ensure government and private sector participation in the promotion of information and information technology to effectively reap the benefits of the Information Age. The SLA believes that a single office with overall information policy and coordination responsibilities offers the best solution to the fragmented and often ineffective provision of information services to the nation. An organizational structure is necessary to coordinate the information needs of society, the infrastructure to move information, and information policies that: (1) promote use of information in support of national priorities; (2) ensure open access within and across national borders; and (3) promote skills necessary to transfer information effectively into solutions. (SLD)

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REVITALIZING AMERICA: INFORMATION STRATEGIES FOR THE 1990's

A Proposal

January 1993

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REVITALIZING AMERICA: INFORMATION STRATEGIES FOR THE 1990's

Executive Summary

It is widely recognized that the United States has moved into the Information Age which has evolved since the advent of computers and communications capable of moving information around the globe. Despite this, the U.S. Government has been slow to establish a single mechanism to coordinate the many facets of the Information Age.

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) proposes the establishment of a National Academy of Information to ensure government and private sector participation in the promotion of information and information technology to effectively reap the benefits of the Information Age.

Other options proposed for consideration include:

- National Institute of Information
- Policy Advisor on Information
- National or Federal Coordinating Council
- U. S. Information Service acting as a government corporation
- Department of Information or National Information Agency.

SLA believes that a single office with overall information policy and coordination responsibilities offers the best solution to the fragmented, and often ineffective, provision of information services to the nation.

Currently, federal government responsibilities for policy, coordination of specific aspects of information activity, provision of national library services, preservation of the nation's history, dissemination of government information, conduct of information related research, telecommunications planning, and international trade and exchange are spread over, and often duplicated in, numerous departments and agencies.

An information strategy is critically needed to address issues relating to the development of an information infrastructure including guaranteed access to government information for all citizens through libraries, distribution programs, community learning centers, and the information highway. We are concerned about the role of libraries in the new age and believe that there needs to be a major focus on information programs within the Executive and Legislative Branches of our government.

An organizational structure is necessary to effectively coordinate the information needs of society, the infrastructure necessary to move information, and information policies that:

- promote use of information in support of national priorities,
- ensure open access within and across national borders, and
- promote skills necessary to effectively transfer information into solutions.

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REVITALIZING AMERICA: INFORMATION STRATEGIES FOR THE 1990's

Introduction

As America awaits a new Administration and the hopes of a better and revitalized America are high, it is essential that the importance of information and the technology that supports it is recognized. The benefits to be accomplished through use of knowledge which already exists or is being generated in today's laboratories, industries and government every day are apparent to those who have been involved in the transformation from the Industrial Age to the Information Age. These benefits must be recognized by those in government who are faced with making decisions on the numerous complex issues now facing the nation. The problems may be more complex and more severe than at any time in this century; they span not only local communities, states and the nation, but countries, regions and the world. Bringing the existing body of knowledge available in both the public and private sectors to bear on these national problems is a high priority.

The Special Libraries Association, an international library organization with 14,000 members in the United States, Canada, Europe, and the Arabian Gulf states, has long been involved in information policy issues at all levels of government, in the private sector, and internationally. Our members support library and information needs of decision makers in industry, government, the professions, and the general public. In *National Information Policies: Strategies for the Future* (1991), SLA recommends the creation of an independent policy organization supported by both the public and private sectors, in the form of an institute or academy. These and other possible structures are summarized below:

National Academy of Information The Academy would be established as an independent, chartered institution similar to the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Public Administration. It would:

- provide governance and oversight for research in information science and technology
- study information policies and programs
- monitor and recommend information policies
- provide a forum for discussion of proposed policies and standards
- coordinate domestic and international policy positions, when appropriate

- review information components of proposed and enacted legislation to assist departments and agencies in effectively implementing them

- through its Board and its panels established to monitor its studies, it would apply the best thinking in the nation to information issues

- work closely with all professional and trade associations with interests in information science and technology

- coordinate Federal and private sector activities related to information science and technology

- provide a forum for international exchange of information in the field, e.g., issues related to transborder data flow, the role of information in the global economy and environment

- support federal and state governments and private organizations in the examination and resolution of issues related to information

National Institute of Information The Institute would be similar in nature to the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Education. It would be a federal institute responsible for surveying the state of information activities, conducting research, and promoting the use of information and information technology by government and the private sector.

Policy Advisor on Information In the Carter Administration information management received attention at a high level through the appointment of a Special Assistant to the President for Information. Though this title brought with it very little overall management responsibilities, it did focus attention on information activities above the individual departments and agencies within the Executive Branch. A number of proposals resulted from this office, including a proposed cataloging center for federal libraries, the use of an issues tracking system to support the Executive Office, and the use of a domestic information display system (DIDS) for policy making and decision support.

What is being proposed here is an advisor who would have a staff dedicated to the coordination of information issues, similar to the Domestic Policy Staff or the Office of Science and Technology. The need which is felt here results primarily from the weakness apparent in the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, whose primary focus is on regulatory matters rather than information, and whose location within the Office of Management and Budget relegates information to a side issue.

National (or Federal) Information Coordinating Council Such a council could take a form similar to that of the Council on Environment Quality and the Council of Economic Advisors, and would thus have a federal focus while still concerned with issues of national

import. It would coordinate information activities within the Executive Branch and provide a government-wide perspective on these programs. It would foster the development of information policies, sponsor research, and address the impact of information science and technology on the nation, its citizenry, and society as a whole. It would coordinate information activities at the international level as well.

U. S. Information Service As a government corporation, this approach would be similar to the U. S. Postal Service. It would incorporate a number of existing information organizations from the federal government, such as the national libraries, the National Technical Information Service and Government Printing Office, the National Archives, the current efforts centered around the establishment of the National Research and Education Network, and other scattered information provision units within the Executive and Legislative Branches. It would be responsible for the expansion of current NREN efforts into a telecommunications infrastructure for the nation.

It may even be time to focus attention on the development of a Department of Information or an independent National Information Agency, as recently suggested by the Progressive Policy Institute in its "Mandate for Change" to fully exploit the Information Age in which we are now living. Because no satisfactory organizational structure currently exists, the idea of an Office of Federal Information Resources Management within the Executive Office of Administration (Grace Commission); an independent information agency which would bring together such information organizations as the GPO, NTIS, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Scientific and Technical Information Facility, and the Department of Energy's Technical Information Services.

Background

In a campaign paper entitled "A National Technology Policy for America", the President-Elect proposes the creation of a 21st century infrastructure to stimulate new national R&D efforts and create markets and jobs. "Such a network could do for the productivity of individuals at their places of work and learning what the interstate highway of the 1950s did for the productivity of the nation's travel and distribution system".

The proposed network would connect schools, hospitals and libraries; it would be connected to the fiber-optic cables spanning the oceans, and result in an "international information highway system" (Naisbitt - *Megatrends 2000*). This international highway will support a second initiative of the Clinton technology policy - the monitoring of what foreign governments are doing that might be applied in this country. Libraries and other information providers will not only use the highways to move information to governments, industry and the general public, they will provide much of the "training for users of networks and databases".

Over the years, there have been attempts to address the nation's need for an information policy and an information infrastructure to meet the challenges and demands of the

Information Age. But little, if any, recognition has been given by government to the new Information Age and what it entails for the advancement of society and the well-being of the nation. To date not one office has been established to address the necessary concerns of an age in which the majority of workers, and those who will seek new jobs, are information workers. No single office has been established to develop an understanding of the impact of information and information technology on society when the new telecommunications infrastructure is in place.

In short, there is no single mechanism for coordination of the many facets of information and information technology - policy discussion and development; coordination of research and development; standards to govern access to, and exchange of, information; training and education essential to maximum use of information and information technology; impacts on society of a new information infrastructure, and issues surrounding transborder dataflow and the role of information in the global economy.

Information Strategy Framework Issues

A large number of specific issues related to information affects its ability to support improvements in the economic and social well-being of the nation. These should become the fabric of a national information strategy, and include:

- Development of an information infrastructure to support life in the Information Age.

- Guaranteed public access to government information through libraries, distribution programs, community learning centers and the information highway.

- Delivery of high quality information in a useful and usable format and manner.

- Training in the use of information technology in the workplace and home, through educational TV programs, community learning centers, adult and lifelong learning educational programs.

- Role of libraries as participants in research and development, learning centers, and disseminators of information through various media and new, user-driven methods.

- Reinstatement of department and agency reference and research staffs in federal government libraries, to strengthen their ability to be purveyors of information to the federal staffs and to the public as well. These librarians must be equipped to use new technology and be specialists in the fields covered by the mission of the organization. Central contracting of technical

services functions could cut costs, take advantage of economies of scale and provide standard methods of access across all federal libraries.

- Increase of U. S. participation in international information forums to facilitate exchange of information among nations, foster development, exploit lessons learned, support a global economy, enhance competitiveness and trade, and broaden research and development at home and abroad.

- Determination of the most effective location for library and other information programs within the Executive Branch to ensure that information to support research and development, technology innovation, economic growth, globalization, competitiveness and social concerns is readily available.

- Appointment of a high level individual to focus attention on information issues, possibly as a presidential advisor or as head of an information agency.

Many of these issues are of a magnitude to require Congressional legislation to ensure action, others require an administration expression of the importance to the nation, and still others, the commitment, involvement, and cooperation, of a number of departments and agencies in carrying out legislative and executive programs.

Organization Structure for Addressing the Needs of an Information Age

To effectively meet the challenges of the 1990's in revitalizing the nation and continuing world leadership, there must be a mechanism in place to address fully:

- the information needs of society,

- an infrastructure that will move information to meet those needs, and most importantly,

- an information policy that will:

    - promote the use of information in meeting pressing national and international needs,

    - ensure open access to information within and across borders, and

    - promote the skills necessary to effectively transfer information into solutions.

Federal government responsibilities in the Information Age are now scattered over a number of organizations, with no single office coordinating the many programs and activities carried out by each. Many of these are involved in:

- **Setting policy and issuing guidelines, often in a single area** -- National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), Office of Science and Technology (OSTP), National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the General Services Administration's Information Resources Management Services (GSA/IRMS).

- **Coordinating one or more aspects of information activity** -- Department of Education, NCLIS, OSTP, National Science Foundation (NSF), NTIA, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), OIRA and GSA/IRMS.

- **Providing national library services** -- Library of Congress (LC), National Agricultural Library (NAL) and National Library of Medicine (NLM).

- **Preserving the nation's history** -- NARA and the 3 national libraries, LC, NAL and NLM.

- **Setting information related standards** -- Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in the Department of Commerce.

- **Disseminating government information** -- Government Printing Office (GPO) and National Technical Information Services (NTIS).

- **Conducting research** -- Department of Education, NCLIS, OSTP, NSF, NTIA, and NIST.

- **Planning telecommunications** -- NTIA, NSF, OSTP, and FCC.

- **International information, including trade issues** -- NTIA, NTIS, U. S. Trade Representative, Department of State, and Department of Commerce.

In order to coordinate activities relating to information, information policy, information provision and information technologies, a central organizational structure is needed. A number of such structures have been recommended, most recently by the 1991 White House Conference on Library and Information Services.

This gathering recommended "that a National Institute for Library and Information Services be established..... " similar to many earlier recommendations for organizations that would be limited in scope of their coverage of information related issues, e.g., libraries. Earlier in 1986, an American Federation of Information Processing Societies' National Information Issues panel called for the establishment of a not-for-profit institute to address national

information issues. In the same year, the Senate passed the Information Age Commission legislation but Congress adjourned before the House passed it.

NTIA in its 1988 report "NTIA TELECOM 2000" recommended a centralized policy making structure for the Executive Branch and in 1989 a number of bills introduced in the House and Senate called for the creation of an advisory committee on information policy and a Commission on Federal Information. A bill introduced in the House in 1990 would have established a Federal Data Protection Board.

CONCLUSION

The Special Libraries Association supports the efforts of the new Administration to create jobs, establish a sound economy for the nation, promote research and development, enhance the nation's productivity and competitiveness in a world market, promote a better education and training system, provide adequate health care to all citizens, renew our cities, and build a new national infrastructure.

SLA believes this can best be done through a heightened emphasis on information and information technology which have made the U. S. the leader in the Information Age. To do this will require a rethinking of our current policies and organizational structures. We do not believe that it will entail huge new sums of money and in fact, may reduce funds already committed to information science and technology in a fragmented and ineffective manner. Attention paid to information policy and programs now will ensure that the Administration's other priorities are met more quickly, and at less cost. Information available to the citizenry will reduce the risk of major disruptions to the economy and society as vital steps are taken to solve the nation's many problems.